

# TULSA WORLD

"Oklahoma's Greatest Newspaper"

EUGENE LORTON

1869-1949

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Saturday, November 5, 1988

## Col. Francis Wilson

YOUNGER Tulsans have no way of knowing what a tremendous, sustained effort it took by farsighted citizens throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s to conceive and bring into being the Arkansas river navigation system.

The project dwarfed a better-known one, the Panama Canal, involving 18 locks and dams to make it possible to bring barges up the Mississippi and the Arkansas rivers to a point northeast of Tulsa.

Col. Francis J. Wilson, who died Thursday, was a key figure in giving the project respectability in the 1940s and in getting construction to the point that the system's completion was a foregone conclusion.

As head of the Tulsa District of the U.S. Corps of Engineers from 1942 to 1946, he directed the report which called for multi-purpose development of the Arkansas and was adopted by Congress.

After retiring from the corps in 1946, he became executive vice president of the Arkansas Basin Development Association in 1952, holding that post until 1969 and staying on as a consultant for several years after that.

In 1969, Wilson was described as "the driving force" behind the project. He was an engineer and a visionary who knew man's ingenuity could improve his environment.

Col. Francis J. Wilson: A good man who worked for a dream and lived to see it come true.



*As the Tulsa World recalled at the time of his death, Col. Francis Wilson epitomized leaders who brought Tulsa District plans into reality. Wilson is shown here with The Tulsa Tribune reporter Joe Howell (left) at a 1987 Arkansas Basin Development Association conference.*

Some believed Gaylord's interest was territorial, favoring Oklahoma City at Tulsa's expense; others that he was caught up in the "upstream/downstream" philosophical debate.

But Monroney's delay amendment failed, 42 to 99, and in the summer of 1946 Congress approved the Arkansas waterway plan and \$150 million for its construction. Finally the waterway plan was official.